African Muslims in Bondage: Realities, Memories, and Legacies
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Between the early 1500s and the 1860s, West African Muslims from Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Benin, and Nigeria were shipped to the New World. They probably represented from 10 to 15 per cent of the 12 to 15 million Africans swept away by the transatlantic slave trade. In the United States, their proportion may have been higher since, in contrast to the rest of the Americas, people from the Senegambia area – heavily Muslim – were the second largest group deported to the North American shores. Thus, from one to two million practitioners of Islam were forced to make their life all over the Americas and the Caribbean.

They found themselves in a double bind: enslaved, and living in a Christian world historically hostile to their religion. Nevertheless, the testimonies of their contemporaries (enslaved and formerly enslaved men and women, slaveholders, chroniclers, journalists, scholars, travelers) as well as their own show that as a group, they managed to keep their faith alive and to practice it in difficult circumstances. Reports of Islamic activities appear in court and police records, in laws, plantation books, newspapers, books, and fugitive ads. In addition, they can be seen in paintings, drawings, daguerreotypes, and photographs; and they have left autobiographies, letters, talismans, and religious manuscripts written in Arabic and in their native languages written in the Arabic script that have been uncovered so far in the United States, Brazil, Jamaica, Trinidad, and the Bahamas.

Although some became crypto-Muslims when forced to convert to Christianity, others continued to live their religion openly, praying in public, insisting on fasting, refusing pork and alcohol, and wearing turbans, flowing robes, skullcaps, and veils (WPA 1942, 141, 161-166, 179-181; Curtin 41; Hodgson 69; Teas 388; Deiben 388; Conrad 252; Callcott 62; Campbell 467; Freyer 319). In Rio de Janeiro and Bahia – and one may assume, elsewhere as well – they operated Qur’anic schools and makeshift mosques in free Muslims’ houses (Rodrigues 53-56; Reis 96-100).

In the forests of eastern Trinidad, demobilized African soldiers of the Third West India Regiment built, in the early 1820s, what seems to be the first documented consecrated mosque in America (Burnley 1842, 25, 98). There, as well as in the United States, Brazil, and Jamaica, enslaved and freed Muslims succeeded in procuring Islamic prayer beads, Qur’ans, and other religious books in Arabic imported through their own networks from Africa and Europe (Raeders 75; Burnley 60; Plumier 1; Gurlay 203; Campbell 467, 471; Hodgson 69; WPA, 1986, 179).

By the end of slavery in the late 1880s, close to four hundred years of continuous Muslim presence had left its mark on the religions and cultures of the American continents. At the time, Islam had been present in West Africa for nine hundred years, but it is in the Americas that the religion touched the most diverse populations. Muslims and non-Muslims from a wide area of Western and Central Africa came into close contact in the slave quarters. Populations from the Congo/Angola area, for example, who had not had any acquaintance with Islam in Africa would become familiar in America – even if only in a superficial way – with at least some tenets of the religion and some Arabic vocabulary. This paper explores two of these traditions and their related terminology brought over the Atlantic by African Muslims that not only helped them nurture their faith and keep their communities together, but have influenced the cultural and religious lives of their non-Muslim companions. These traditions have been essential in psychological and physical resistance, and live on today as important components of the cultures of some communities of African descent.
Charity Among the Enslaved

One essential tradition in Islam is sadaga, or freewill offerings. Sadaga or sadaga al-Tatwaw (alms of spontaneity) is a voluntary charity that can consist of anything the believer wishes to give: money, food, or clothes. To give sadaga is considered an act of worship. Although the giving of charity in a situation of abject poverty such as was prevalent in American slavery may seem unlikely, it has nevertheless been documented in places as diverse as the United States, Brazil, Trinidad, Tobago, and Grenada.

On Sapelo Island — part of the Sea Islands of Georgia and South Carolina — Katie Brown remembered in the 1930s that her grandmother Margaret, a daughter of Bilali, a Guinean Muslim who left a 13-page document in Arabic, (Greenberg 372-75; Martin 589-601) used to make rice cakes she called saraka (WPA, 1986, 62). On nearby St. Simons Island, Ben Sullivan related that his father Bilali — the son of Sallu Bilali, a Muslim from Senegambia, Mali — made the saraka (182). Shadrack Rundolph of St. Marys recalled that his grandmother Sally made the cakes. "These rice cakes were not indigenous to the South; their recipe and their fashion were brought from Muslim West Africa. Rice cakes are the charity customarily offered by women on Fridays. After jumma or noon prayer, they hand them out to the neighborhood's children. The rice cake is not called saraka, but the act of giving is a sadaga. In the Sea Islands, as in Africa, the saraka were given to the children. ShadrackHall (great-grandson of Bilali) recalled: "Doh cake made, she call us all in and she hab big big jumnuh full an she glib us each cake." (167). It is recommended that the gift be accompanied by a supplication to God so, in West Africa women handing out the cakes say that it is a saraka or sadaq, made in the name of Allah and utter the word ameen, which has the same meaning as the Christian amen. The practice was similar in the Sea Islands: "Den we all round room table, and she say's 'Ameen, Ameen, Ameen,' as we all eats cake."

Although the correct Arabic term is sadaga, sadaga is not an American neologism or the product of the Muslims' descendants' faulty memory. The word saraka is indeed an African linguistic creation brought over by the Muslims. The Fulani of Guinea, Senegal, Nigeria, Niger, and Mali use the word sadaq; but the Wolof of Senegal call the charity sarath, the Mandinka of Senegal and the Bambara of Mali use the term saraka, and the Yoruba saraun. The Mulinte of Guinea, the Junta of Côte d'Ivoire and the Hausa of Nigeria call the giving of charity saraka.

The West African sadaq or saraka has several functions: to attract divine grace; reinforce a prayer; expiate a sin; or conjure a potential danger. The reasons behind the giving of saraka in the Sea Islands could only have been relevant to the women's particular lives in servitude. They may have wanted to bring in divine grace to avoid the separation — through sale — of their families, or punishment, or the arrest of a fugitive. They may also have tried to get protection for their family left behind in West Africa — including against the slave trade — and asked God's grace for the well being of the enslaved community. This almsgiving was true to the authentic spirit of sadaga since tradition states that the best sadaga is the one given by a person who owns little. The hungry and deprived children who were the recipients of their charity evidently appreciated the women's gesture: they created a special song about the cakes that can still be heard in the Sea Islands:

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Rice cake, rice cake
Sweet me so
Rice cake sweet me to my heart. (Crum 265).

For sadaga to be maintained in conditions of dismal poverty evidences the importance it must have had in the life of the Muslim communities. The fact that at least one man, as noted earlier, made the rice cakes — an exclusively female activity — only reinforces this assertion.

People were clearly disposed to cross rigid gender boundaries in order to keep up the custom. The giving of charity certainly played its traditional role of reinforcing cohesion and confraternity and contributed to the spiritual and social well being of the group. Saraka was a link to the past, but also an expression of control over the present, and insurance for the future. In giving the gift in order for something to happen or not to happen can be seen as an affirmation that their enslavers had no real power over the enslaved people's lives and that neither the present nor the future rested in these strangers' hands. It meant that the community could influence its own fate with the proper prayers and alms.

From Muslim Tradition to Ancestors' Offerings

Sadaga can be traced to other areas of the Diaspora. In Tobago, Carriacou, and Grenada, people of African descent offer sadaga during the Big Drum Dance or Nation Dance (African nations), also called saraka or salaka (Simpson 102-103; McDaniel).

There, however, the word is not associated with rice cakes, but rather with an offering of food and beverages to the ancestors to thank them for their past blessings and ask for their continuous support. After they have received their share, the rest of the food is distributed to the children and, lastly, to the adults. The African communities that perform the saraka are not of Muslim tradition. The nations whose descendants take part in the Big Drum Dance are the Tenne (Sierra Leone), the Chambe and the Igbo (Nigeria), the Kongo, the Koromantin (Akan from Ghana, Togolese Arada and Benin, and the Moko in Nigera and Cameroon). However, the Mandinka, who have been early Muslims in Africa, are also part of the saraka. Their presence may indicate that it is from them that the other groups learned of alms giving in the form of sadaga.

The participation of Muslims in the Nation Dance may appear incongruous. However, contrary to popular views — influenced by the cultures of Islam in the Middle East — there is no contradiction in the association of Muslims, dance, and drums. Actually, a description of sadaga in Sierra Leone in the 1830s, therefore during the period of American slavery, reveals that drumming could be an integral part of certain types of alms giving. In one instance, in the Muslim town of Medina, the giving of alms — in the presence of "many Muslim chiefs" — included the sacrifice of eight bullocks and other animals, as well as drumming. And another "sataka [sic] was performed at Roboysar for a child accidentally shot in the head; and the travelers were much annoyed with the noise of to-moming" (Clarke 169, 170, 176).

In the Caribbean, Arabic vocabulary and Islamic practice can be detected in the songs specific to each nation performing the saraka. For example, in Carriacou, a Koromantin song concludes with salamani-o, which seems derived from asalamu aleikum (McDaniel 47-48). Another Koromantin song goes "Anancy-o, Sari Baba." Sari, in Manding, Yoruba, and Hausa is a gavel made of cereals and milk that people eat, in particular, early in the morning during Ramadan. The word comes from the Arabic sabur, the predawn sweet dish eaten during the annual fast. In Manding languages, baba is a term of respect for a father or an older man. Throughout the West Indies, baba has retained this meaning and is used to designate a father, grandfather, or senior member of a household. Sari baba would thus refer to the giving of a rice dish associated with the Muslims to an elder, which is precisely what the West Indian saraka is meant to be. There is at least one other retension of the word sari among people who...
practiced sadaga in the West, in Guilhall terminology, it describes “boiled rice pounded” (Turner 2001).

In Trinidad, suraka refers to a ceremony held in honor of ancestors. Melville and Frances Herkovits who studied the practice in the 1940s called it sakara and mentioned that “sakara [is] an African designation for the offerings given the ancestors.” (Herkovits 88). There may be confusion between suraka and sakara, but both terminologies have an Islamic background. Sakara is the name of a specific Yoruba drum and of the type of religious music played to this day by the Yoruba of Nigeria. In the Trinidadian context, the word probably refers to the music that accompanied the giving of suraka. Part of the Trinidadian suraka is ground corn mixed with sugar. It is called saman on the island, chanmchan or samson in Haiti, shum-shum in Jamaica, and shumshum in the rest of the Carribbean (Angliade 78; Nunez 426, 427, 429). The etymology of the words is probably simsim, sesame, in Arabic. But it may also be zangam, the sacred well located near the Kattta in Mecca whose water is said to be curative. In Hausa, for example, zangam has come to refer to anything good.

Since Muslims do not make offerings to their ancestors, the Caribbean communities that give suraka evidently borrowed the word from them, but not the ceremony. It is possible that the enslaved Muslims of Tobago, Trinidad, Grenada, and Carriacou gave charity to their non-Muslim companions, following the Qur’anic injunction that states that sadaga may be given to non-Muslims.Freewill offerings may thus have been associated with the Muslims, and the gesture may have made a lasting impression on the non-Muslims who borrowed the terminology and its meaning, as they developed and adapted their own rites. It is also possible that the non-Muslims attributed a particular power to the Muslims’ offerings and thus adopted this word. This is a common occurrence in Africa, where Islam and other religions have been living side by side for as long as a thousand years. People who follow different religions have other incorporated Arabic words and other Islamic elements that they see as reinforcing their own beliefs and liturgy. The hypothesis of a Muslim community, in America, holding a ceremony for the ancestors also has to be considered. However, evidence shows that the West African Muslims undertook considerable efforts for the maintenance of Islamic orthodoxy in the New World. In point of fact, as exemplified in the Sea Islands and Brazil, when enslaved Muslims and non-Muslims participated in the same celebrations, each group seems to have stayed true to its particular rituals, as has habitually been the case in Africa (Diof 1998, 192-193). This reality is observable in Trinidad, where suraka are usually given by Yoruba and Hausa descendants, and by other groups who emulate their practice. It is significant that the Hausa, at least up to a certain time, had a different way of offering suraka, and the documentation does not show that they gave it to their ancestors. According to informants interviewed in the 1970s, a Hausa man who was a practicing Muslim, gave suraka by killing an animal in the halal manner (by letting it bleed), and insisted on his deathbed that the ritual be performed, after his death, by a Muslim cleric (Lewis 69). Another said simsillah (in the name of God), the formula that Muslims are supposed to utter before engaging in any activity, as he gave away the food. His suraka, like in Muslim West Africa and the Sea Islands, consisted of soaked rice (116). In contrast, when suraka is described among others, it is associated with the pouring of rum; no mention is made of halal butchering, and the sacrificed animal is sometimes a pig (Lewis 32; Herkovits 87-91). These three elements are anathema in Islam.

Evidence suggests that non-Muslims, in the Caribbean, borrowed the Islamic tradition of freewill offerings and its Arabic name, and incorporated them into their own rites, while the Muslims continued their particular rituals. In the Sea Islands, on the other hand, there is no indication that the tradition expanded to non-Muslims. Mentions of suraka by the Work Progress Administration interviewees occurred only in families that can be linked with certainty to Islam. The people who remembered suraka also remembered their ascendants using words like ameen, and praying several times a day (WPA, 1986, 141, 161-166, 179; Parrish 27). But for the non-Muslims as for their Muslim companions, suraka was an expression of agency. It was a link to the past since it celebrated the ancestors, but the past was linked to the present and the future because the ancestors were asked for their benediction and approval of future actions. Power and influence, in other words, were not with the dominant society, but with the ancestors.

Islamic Protections

Another tradition the Muslims brought to the Americas was the making of amulets. Most African societies use amulets for protection, but Islamic talismans — from the start — use the written word and are thus easily recognizable. Most Islamic amulets or gris-gris consist of a piece of paper on which the marabout (holy man, teacher, scholar) has written kabbalistical signs, numbers arranged in a grid, or excerpts of a surah or chapter of the Qur’an. The paper is then folded and sewn in cotton fabric or leather for preservation. In Spanish America and Brazil, amulets are called bolsas de mandinga (or Mandinka purses because there, as in Africa, they were carried in a leather pouch), or simply mandingos. The men who make the mandingas are called mandingueiros. The Mandinka, early Muslims, have had a long reputation in Africa for the efficiency of their amulets, and their occult skills were evidently held in high regard in the Americas, as linguistics clearly indicates (Diof 2003).

Amulets are not an object of worship; they are a medium — like a Catholic saint medal — through which one seeks divine help and protection. In Africa, non-Muslims routinely use Islamic gris-gris because they are reputed to be particularly effective, and evidence indicates that during slavery, this tradition was maintained in the Americas by African and native born people who followed other religions. Amulets are meant to protect the bearer, to bring well-being, health, and success to one person or one’s family; or to defeat or neutralize an opponent. In times of conflict, people wear them to increase their strength, and to escape injury and death. Slave dealers were well aware of the relationship between marabouts, amulets, and slave revolts. As explained by an employee of the French slave dealing Compagnie du Sénégal in the eighteenth century: “Marabouts who give and bless Grigris are very dangerous for the slave traders, and if some are among the slaves, it is almost certain that there will be some seditions or revolts. They always promise them that they will overcome the Whites, this is why one always take the precaution of taking away their Grigris” (Lamiral 254-55).

Examples of the “seditious” power of amulets can be found in Saint Domingue. There, the most prominent maroon leader, François Macandal, a Muslim who, according to contemporary informants “knew the Arabic very well”, was so well known for his talismanic skills that amulets were called macandian (Madiou 35; Fouchard 497-97). He may have been a Muslim because the machine that is attributed to him, the Macandian, was a spiritual protection. Since only marabouts may make Islamic amulets, there is strong indication that Macandal had been a cleric before his deportation, and that he continued to be one during his life in the West. He had built a large following, and he launched a movement for the takeover of the island by the enslaved population. Caught in 1758, as he was preparing his assault on Cap-Français, he was burnt at the stake. Gris-gris continued to be used, however, and a French Colonele revealed this decades later: “During the wars 1 was obliged to do against the blacks, we often found written papers in the bags or macoutes of the few Negroes we killed. The patriots used to yell, when the soldiers brought those papers: see, this is the Aristocrates’ correspondence. Nobody understood those writings. It was Arabic.” (Malefant 211).

These papers could have been correspondence pertaining to the then enfofolding revolution, but they may also have been mixed with occult protections consisting of pages of prayers and
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numerous amulets, a hand is drawn and inside each finger is written the name of one holy prophet. In addition, some people wear a silver hand around their neck. Like the figa, these amulets are used to protect the bearer from evil spells and the eyes of witches.

Islamic gris-gris and occult sciences typical of Sufism played a significant part in the social and religious life of peoples of African descent. Muslim or not, in the Americas. Their importance lies in the fact that people believed in them, not in their real or supposed efficiency. They gave self-confidence, a sense of power over one's body and life, and over one's relations with others in the community. Amulets were important for everyday life for their biological survival, but they were critical in times of conflict. The men who wore them and went into battle, during slave uprisings or maroon wars, believed they could not be killed, that their enemies would be crushed and that victory was certain. Gris-gris were consequently more than a protection; they were a weapon of war that enabled the insurgents to be fearless, to defy danger, and challenge death. Thus, besides their personal significance to individuals who needed hope and a sense of security, the gris-gris served a communal purpose that was highly subversive in a situation of servitude. Amulets, like saraka, embodied the search for control over one's life and the life of one's community. They were a negation, in other words, of the essence of slavery.

Memories and Legacies

The study of the Muslim community and of some of its traditions contributes to show that religions and cultural habits did not just “survive”, but were deliberately developed, maintained, nurtured, reinforced, and shared sometimes at great personal and communal cost. It also shows that Islam could survive outside the transculutural process for several centuries, although it ultimately disappeared in its orthodox form as brought by the Africans.

The retention of a specific tradition while others eventually disappeared indicates a concerted effort on the part of a community to preserve the aspects of its native culture, beliefs, and social organization that mattered most and helped survival and adaptation. People saw saraka and gris-gris as effectively solving their secular and supernatural problems, and therefore continued to adopt and reintroduce them. Their adoption and reinterpretation by these groups show that these specific elements had a universal appeal that transcended religion and ethnicity, and were an essential part of people’s strategies for adaptation to new conditions, as well as psychological, social, and political resistance to them.

Islam and the Muslims have vanished from the consciousness of the people who today continue to practice rituals or use words and expressions that were brought over the Atlantic by practicing Muslims. It is perplexing that a few decades have been sufficient, notably in the United States, to erase their memory. Given the fact that West African Muslims (and non-Muslims) were introduced illegitimately throughout the nineteenth century and possibly continued to practice Islam into the early twentieth century, their disappearance from African American collective memory has to be addressed (Diouf 1998, 179-84).

One contributing factor may have been the hegemony of the Christian churches that spread considerably among African Americans right before and after the Civil War. Christianity was an affirmation of belonging to humanity, as defined by whites, and to the nation. African religions, on the other hand, were ruled pugnism and witchcraft— still a widespread notion — a throwback to an “uncivilized” state. Indeed, echoing the prevalent sentiment of the time, the three main black nationalists of the nineteenth century, Martin R. Delany, Alexander Crummell, and Henry M. Turner, portrayed African Americans as “barbarian savages” who had to be redeemed by Christianity. The Constitution they drafted for the African Civilization Society (1858) stated that its goal was to “civilize” and Christianize Africa. Turner, who had a positive view of the Muslims of West Africa, also saw them as “the...
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forrunners of evangelical Christianity; in short the Muḥammadan religion is the morning star to the sun of pure Christianity" (Turner 60). It is likely that the amalgam of their traditional religions and Islam with witchcraft and paganism pushed Africans across the stop talk and the rest are remaining with them. Zora Neale Hurston, who interviewed Cujo Lewis (not a Muslim), who arrived from Benin in 1680 on the Clotilda - the last documented slave ship to the United States - noted with perspicacity that he "is now an ardent Christian and is, I believe, hiding or suppressing what he knows about African religion for fear of being thought a heretic." (Hurston 653). Yet, first-hand information that would have corrected these stereotypes was available to Americans. In 1873, Mohammad Ali ben Soud, originally from Bornu (Nigeria), had published his autobiography in Memphis, Tennessee and lectured throughout the country (Said). His book provided information on Africa, Islam, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. In addition, at the same period Edward W. Blyden, the Virgin Islands native and Christian missionary, wrote and lectured at length about Islam and the Muslims he had met in West Africa (Blyden, 1871; 1877, 100-27; 1967).

In the early twentieth century, Christian churches were no longer alone in trying to cater to the soul of the black community. Two movements that claimed to be Islamic recruited principally among Southerners who had migrated North during the Great Migration. But the Moorish Science Temple of America (MSTA) and the Nation of Islam of the 1920s did not mention any link between African Muslims - in Africa or formerly enslaved in America - and their own unorthodox brands of Islam. On the contrary, the MSTA related African Americans to the Moroccans and the "Asiatic" people; and the Nation of Islam under Fard Muhammad also claimed an Asiatic origin for the "so-called Negroes." (Pauzeau; Cleag; Shouk, Hanwic and O’Hare 137-191).

Therefore, even among African Americans who presented themselves as Muslims no acknowledgment was made of the African Muslims' presence and potential contributions to later American constructions of Islam. There again, and once again, the narrative seems to have disappeared. Or if it did not, it was certainly glossed over, probably because an association with Africans and Africa was regarded as far less validating, much less conducive to self-esteem and pride, than an association with the Moorish empire and the great civilizations of Asia. Nevertheless, even if the leaders did not recognize any link with African Muslims, it is not a coincidence that the largest proportion of Muslims was also the one to develop an early form of proto-Islam. Just as the men and women interviewed by the WPA in the Sea Islands had seen great-grandparents and grandparents praying and following other Pillars of Islam, it is likely that some early followers of the MSTA and the Nation of Islam had also noted Islamic behavior among some family members. Like the Sea Islands descendants, they probably did relate any of it to Islam. But later in the North, some of the gestures, words, expressions, and dress of the followers of the MSTA and the Nation of Islam would have seemed familiar to them and evidence that Islam was the black man's early religion - as claimed by both movements - since it was what their own ancestors had been practicing.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the situation has been quite different. There, some African-derived religions - such as Candomblé, Macumba, Umbanda, and Vodoo - readily acknowledge Islam and the Muslims, just as they acknowledge the presence and contributions of several other groups and religions (Carneiro 37; Ramos 88-91; Menesson 1952, 1959; Molina). Today, Cubans of various faiths keep on greeting one another by saying aláfi or "may all go well" (from the Arabic al-afiya: happiness, health, peace, absence of problem). The greetings and the last sentence of the prayer of the followers of Palo Mayome or Palo Montana - a Congo religion - is the customary Islamic salutation, or asáfí, but there is no indication of people know where that expression comes from. Descendants of some Maroon populations in Jamaica use the same greeting (Afrón). Arabic words are also numerously in the vocabulary of Umbanda, a Brazilian spiritualistic religion that uses "la lingua Angola" as its ritual language, but intersperses it with Arabic words and expressions. Among them are: oculó or judge (from the Arabic al-qadi or judge), aljena or diabolical spirits (from jinn, bad spirits), exorcism or fast (from sawm, the month-long fast of Ramadan), and suba or God gives you a good day (from alah baraka li, may God bless your day), all ramada li lai or Praise to the Lord of the universe (from al-handu lilahi, praise be to God). In Cuba, Jamaica, and Brazil, as well as in other Latin American countries people generally do not know the Arabic origin of these words and expressions even though they use them daily.

Although the memory seems lost, the legacy nevertheless lives on, and one can find several other contemporary manifestations of the Islamic substrata in the cultures of the African Diaspora. A saying of the American South: "wash your feet, say your prayers, and go to bed," seems a likely reference to the Muslim prayer, done after one has accomplished his/her ablutions, which include the washing of the feet. This interpretation is all the more compelling because some people today recall having seen grandparents wash their feet in a peculiar manner before praying; a way they now recognize as being similar to Muslim ablutions.

Other indications that Islamic behavior inherited from earlier times was still rampant in the twentieth century can be found among some people who regard themselves as Hebrews. The oldest member of New York's Black Hebrew community, who was born on the island of Montserrat in 1904, mentions that in her area, people did not eat pork or carrion, but only animals that they had killed themselves by cutting their throats, letting the blood drip; and that men were circumcised (McLeod). Seeing some convergence with Jewish practices she and other people of African descent "reverted" to the Hebrew faith as early as the 1920s. According to their creed, their ancestors are the true Hebrews who were scattered from Palestine to West Africa and sold by native Africans to the European slave dealers because of their foreign religion and customs. Given the lack of historical foundation of this interpretation, it is much more likely that their ancestors were Muslims who indeed are circumcised; follow the Qur’anic injunction "Forbade to you are dead meat (carcass), blood, the flesh of swine" (5:3); and bleed their animals to death.

In the cultural area, the Blues may be counted as a legacy of the African Muslims. According to musicologist John Storm Roberts, the Blues' "long, bending and swooping notes are similar to the Islam-influenced styles of much of West Africa." In addition the "pounding of notes" and other techniques used in the Blues are found "in Islamic African music and hardly at all in other styles" (Roberts 213; Charters 125; Oliver 88; Lomax 233). Parallelisms are equally strong between early Blues, the adhan or call to prayer, and the recitation of the Qur'an. Levee Camp Holler, a piece recorded in a Southern penitentiary by Alan Lomax, is an almost perfect replica of the adhan as done in West Africa: it has the same ornamented notes, tortuously elongated sounds, pauses, nasal booming, and simple unaccompanied melody. This suggests that during slavery, Muslims, when called to prayer - their chanting would probably have been perceived as just another African work song by overseers - even though laborers, in the fields, may have only been able to pray "in their head." The wider community then would have appropriated and secularized this specific type of music.

Research throughout the African Diaspora will uncover more Islamic contributions, particularly in the French and British Caribbean, Guyana, and French Guiana that were re-Africanized and to a certain extent, re-Islamized with the arrival of tens of thousands of African captives and indentured servants from the 1840s to the 1870s. The study of Islamic communities in the Americas will also tell us more about Islam and the Muslims in West Africa between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. By showing what they brought to the Americas, what they shed, and what they kept and developed, we will have a better idea of
who they were, how they lived their faith, and when some Islamic cultural elements were developed in Africa. For example, the offering of rice cakes as a charity exists throughout West Africa, but not in other parts of the Muslim world, and it does not appear in the Qur'an. It is a West African tradition that was evidently well established by the eighteenth century when it was transported west.

Research in its Islamic component is shedding new light on the African Diaspora. It shows that Islam and the Muslims have had a much wider and deeper influence in the Americas than suspected so far. Islam and the African Muslims, hidden in plain view and ignored for so long, represent a missing link that helps us understand some of the "unexplained" features of the cultures transported, recreated, and adapted by the Africans and their descendants, and enable us to form a more detailed and comprehensive picture of the cultures and religions of the African Diaspora.

Endnotes

1 Sam-Sam was the name of one of the eighteenth-century leaders of the maroon communities of Dutch Guiana. Arabi, whose name, like his predecessor's suggests a Muslim background, succeeded him in 1757.

2 I wish to thank Tuffy Caius for bringing this document to my attention, and Imam Souleimane Konaté for working on its interpretation.

3 Ironically, in most African cultures the practice of witchcraft -- or being accused of doing so -- led to enslavement and, during the era of the Atlantic slave trade, to deportation to the Americas.

4 In Cuba, during slavery (and today), Yoruba practitioners of divination used the expression to indicate that they foresaw a positive outcome. Among the Gullah of Georgia and South Carolina, Afaaliya is a female name. Lorenzo Dow Turner, Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949: 49.

5 The Palo prayer is:

Juro Dio, mambe! Dio!
Tres persones y un solo Dios. Verdadero
Santo Tomas, Vete para otra
Guakanda Congo! Gaa!
Endando Kuna, nduno, Nduno!
Endando Kuna, rito, Moto!
Somos o no somos, Somos!
Sala Malekan! Maleman Sala!


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